

washingtonpost.com

## Share of female lawmakers hits new global high

By Michelle Nichols

Reuters

Thursday, March 1, 2007; 3:20 PM

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - The share of female politicians around the world reached a record of high of almost 17 percent in 2006 -- up nearly 6 percentage points during the past decade -- a global parliamentary group said on Thursday.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union also found women presided over 35 of the world's 262 parliaments -- another record high -- with females elected to the position for the first time in Gambia, Israel, Swaziland, Turkmenistan and the United States, where [Nancy Pelosi](#) is now House speaker.

But the rate of increase in female legislators has slowed, the group said.

"The bad news is that the increase in the number of women is slower than it was in the preceding year and if we are aiming for equality in parliament ... then we will wait until the year 2077 to celebrate that event," said Anders Johnsson, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's secretary-general.

In the United States there was 16 percent female representation, in Canada there was 35 percent, and in Britain women held 18.9 percent of seats, while in Rwanda and Sweden women make nearly half of the parliament.

There was a 19.1 percent representation in Europe, 16.8 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 16.1 percent in Asia, 14.5 percent in the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand) and 8.6 percent in the Arab states.

"The Pacific Islands states have registered absolutely zero progress in the past decade, and judging from the past we don't see much hope for progress in the coming elections," Johnsson told a news conference.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union found that less than 3 percent of lawmakers in the Pacific Island states were women and no females won seats at elections held in 2006 in the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

Johnsson also said there had also been a reversal of the successful trends seen in post-conflict countries, with elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti seeing a fall in the number of female politicians.

"One of the reasons we are doing well in some areas is because of quotas," he said.

The group found that 23 countries used gender quota systems to boost female representation and in those countries women had won nearly 22 percent of seats, while in countries without quotas females held about 12 percent.

"It is quite far from a satisfactory picture that we have and even further from the objective of parity that we would like to achieve," said Margareth Mensah-Williams, vice-president of the union's executive committee.

Advertisement



"Women change the way politics are made."

© 2007 Reuters

**Ads by Google**

**Free Credit Score**

The average US credit score is 675 The cost to see yours: \$0  
[www.FreeCreditReport.com](http://www.FreeCreditReport.com)